

# EASTERN ORTHODOX PERSPECTIVES ON FALLENNESS AND SINFULNESS

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There are various ways to present an Eastern Orthodox perspective on fallenness and sinfulness. One could present a single theologian's view, or the Orthodox consensus, if there is one. But by doing so we would miss out on all the dissonances, peculiarities, particular insights, and developments that can be found in the history of Orthodox thought. Therefore, it seems more appropriate to present the thought of some of the most important theologians in chronological order, and subsequently to discuss their common ground.

By Eastern Orthodox theologians we mean theologians accepted by an Orthodox church. Such a church is part of the family of churches that consider the seven Ecumenical Councils as authoritative in regard to doctrine (creeds) and discipline (canon law), and that acknowledge the honorary primacy of the Patriarch of Constantinople<sup>1</sup>. However, the difficulty with this description is, firstly, that it excludes theologians highly revered by the Orthodox church, such as St. Basil who lived before Constantinople became a Patriarchate, and secondly, that it is not in every theologian's case clear what we mean by 'accepted'. Some, as is the case with Maximus, were condemned during their lifetime, only to be accepted later on.<sup>2</sup> Others are revered and regarded as Orthodox but their more extreme teachings are not accepted by the church.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the somewhat flexible criterion used here for regarding theologians as Eastern Orthodox is their impact and constructive influence, during their own lifetime or later, on the teaching of the church which is in historical continuity with the church of the seven councils.

This implies that we will refrain from discussing theologians of the Oriental Orthodox Churches (Armenian, Coptic, Ethiopian, and Syrian Orthodox). The reason for this is not the fact that these churches rejected the Christological teaching of the Council of Chalcedon. After all, they might still have some theological insight to offer. It is simply a means of making the material spanning temporally from Augustine down to our present time more manageable. Some Eastern Theologians

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<sup>1</sup>The honorary precedence of Constantinople was granted at the First Council of Constantinople (381).

<sup>2</sup>Maximus was exiled after questionings first in 653 and later again in 661, at which probable occasion his right hand and his tongue were cut off. His teaching concerning the two wills of Christ was vindicated within twenty years of his death at the Sixth Council of Constantinople (680).

<sup>3</sup>Such as Symeon. Basil Krivocheine, *In the Light of Christ* (Crestwood: SVS, 1986), 63.

## **Pseudo-Macarius: Sin as a Garment of the Soul**

In the Eastern church the Pseudo-Macarian homilies made a strong impact on St. Symeon, the New Theologian, and generally on hesychastic writers such as Gregory Palamas.<sup>4</sup> The fifty homilies contain practical monastic teachings and spiritual admonition with a strong emphasis on spiritual battle and on the experience of the Holy Spirit. They also contain short passages dealing with our topic, 'fallenness and sinfulness'. As can be expected from spiritual homilies, the topic is neither discussed systematically nor in an isolated fashion, but rather serves as a starting point or has an explanatory function for a development of thoughts on salvation and perfection. Therefore, we cannot hope to find an exhaustive systematic treatment of our topic in the Homilies.

Central to the hamartiology of Pseudo-Macarius is the notion that sin is external to humanity and is of a different nature.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, sin is so closely connected to the soul that, 'he who does the wish of his soul, does the wishes of evil'.<sup>6</sup> Different images are used to illustrate the relation between sin and the human soul, e.g., sin is seen as a garment of the soul which corrupts all parts of humanity, mind and body.<sup>7</sup> Generally, Macarius presents sin as the illness of passions,<sup>8</sup> as evil desire.<sup>9</sup>

When Pseudo-Macarius discusses our inheritance from Adam he does not focus on the forensic aspects (i.e., inherited guilt), which for him have been dealt with by Christ: 'Indeed, I satisfied Adam's debts when I was crucified and I descended into hell. And I command you, O Hell, O Darkness, O Death, release the imprisoned souls of the children of Adam.'<sup>10</sup> It is rather the latter statement which is his concern: the children of Adam are imprisoned by death,<sup>11</sup> by having been made slaves of carnal passions.<sup>12</sup> They inherit the 'same stench',<sup>13</sup> they are all part of that dark race and they all share in the consequent suffering. For Pseudo-Macarius '...we were wounded with an incurable wound. Only the Lord could heal it. For this he came in his own person...'.<sup>14</sup> This statement is also a good demonstration of how embedded Pseudo-Macarius' thoughts on sin and suffering are in the greater framework of divine salvation.

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<sup>4</sup> G A Maloney, 'Introduction', in Pseudo-Macarius, *The Fifty Spiritual Homilies and the Great Letter* (The Classics of Western Spirituality) (Mahwah: Paulist, 1992), 21.

<sup>5</sup> Pseudo-Macarius, Hom II, 2.

<sup>6</sup> Hom XV, 35.

<sup>7</sup> Hom II, 1-3.

<sup>8</sup> Hom XLIV, 2.

<sup>9</sup> Cf Hom. XVI, 4.

<sup>10</sup> Hom XI, 10.

<sup>11</sup> Hom XI, 5, 11.

<sup>12</sup> Hom XXV, 3.

<sup>13</sup> Hom XXX, 8.

<sup>14</sup> Hom XXX, 8.

## Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita: Exchange of Eternity for Mortality

The Pseudo-Dionysian writings, an early sixth century creative synthesis of Christian and neoplatonic thought, made a strong impact on spirituality first in the East and subsequently in the West. The writings are particularly known for their hierarchical understanding of God,<sup>15</sup> of heaven,<sup>16</sup> and of the church<sup>17</sup>. These hierarchies are characterised by a connection between the principles of unity and three-fold division. As a simple example we might mention the ecclesiastical hierarchy of bishop, priest, and deacon. These hierarchies are for Pseudo-Dionysios God's gift 'to ensure the salvation and divinisation of every being endowed with reason and intelligence'.<sup>18</sup> They are therefore neither simply an end in themselves nor merely an observed pattern of reality.

The Neo-Platonic slant of Pseudo-Dionysius, expressed in his cosmological, static, hierarchical depiction of reality, in which there is little room for the dynamics of history, is noticeable in his treatment of fallenness and related topics. There is a lengthy discourse on the nature of evil in his work<sup>19</sup>, however, a direct reference to Adam and Eve we will not be able to find. The only place where our topic is touched upon is in the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy. To get a flavour of Pseudo-Dionysius this whole passage is worth quoting:

From the very beginning human nature has stupidly glided away from those good things bestowed on it by God. It turned to the life of the most varied desires and came at the end to the catastrophe of death. There followed the destructive rejection of what was really good, a trampling over the sacred Law laid down in paradise for man. Having evaded the yoke which gave him life, man rebelled against the blessings of God and was left to his own devices, to the temptation and the evil assaults of the devil. And in exchange for eternity he pitifully opted for mortality. Born of corruption it was only right that he should leave the world as he entered it. He freely turned away from the divine and uplifting life and was dragged instead as far as possible in the opposite direction and was plunged into the utter mess of passion. Wandering far from the right path, ensnared by destructive and evil crowds, the human race turned away from the true God and witlessly served neither gods nor friends but its enemies who, out of their innate lack of pity, took the cruelest advantage of its weakness and dragged it down to the deplorable

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<sup>15</sup> Cf 'The Divine Names', Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works* (Classics of Western Spirituality), (London: SPCK, 1987), 47–132.

<sup>16</sup> Cf Pseudo-Dionysius, 'The Celestial Hierarchy', 143–192.

<sup>17</sup> Cf Pseudo-Dionysius, 'The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy', 193–260.

<sup>18</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius, *De eccl. hier.*, 376B.

<sup>19</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius, *De div. Nom.*, IV, 716A-733D.

peril of destruction and dissolution of being.<sup>20</sup>

Humanity has turned away from God and, as a result, has lost eternal life. Apart from having to face death and destruction it has entered a sphere where it is enslaved by its own lusts and demonic forces.

Neither in his treatment of adult baptism,<sup>21</sup> nor in that of infant baptism,<sup>22</sup> does Pseudo-Dionysius mention the remission of ancestral guilt, passed down from Adam. This is, according to Gross, particularly astonishing, as Pseudo-Dionysius tries to argue the case in favour of infant baptism only by using the argument that for a child to participate in the sacred symbols is a means of getting accustomed to a holy way of life.<sup>23</sup> The silence on ancestral guilt shows that for Pseudo-Dionysius children were not *a priori* excluded from salvation due to inherited guilt if they were not baptised.

### **Maximus Confessor: *Philautia* as the Root of Evil**

Maximus (ca. 580-662) was the most excellent dogmatic and mystic theologian of the Eastern church in the seventh century. Two studies of Maximus are of particular interest for this paper: Thunberg's *Microcosm and Mediator*<sup>24</sup> and von Balthasar's *Kosmische Liturgie*.<sup>25</sup> The latter contains a section that deals specifically with our present topic: 'Man and guilt'.<sup>26</sup> He states in it, 'Maximus is, as far as the theology of the fall as an historical fact is concerned, little original; he attempts to harmonise the opinions of earlier [theologians]. The new can be found in him in the way the fall is regarded as being present in the actual today.'<sup>27</sup>

Maximus had a higher view of pre-lapsarian humanity than the biblical account of paradise itself. This makes the Fall, in Gross' words, an 'unsolvable psychological puzzle'<sup>28</sup> because it is not clear how such a perfect human being could ever have been deceived. For Maximus, Adam was not without a body, however, his body was of a finer materiality and non-sexual. His sexuality was to be introduced after the fall.<sup>29</sup> Adam was entirely devoid of ignorance and thus also of a wavering opinion. His union with God was so deep that it was an

<sup>20</sup> *De eccl. hier*, 440C - 441A.

<sup>21</sup> *De eccl. hier* 397B - 404D.

<sup>22</sup> *De eccl. hier* 565D - 569A.

<sup>23</sup> J Gross. *Geschichte des Erbsündendogmas, Band II* (München, Basel: Ernst Reinhardt, 1963), 204.

<sup>24</sup> L. Thunberg. *Microcosm and Mediator. The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor*. (Lund: Gleerup, 1965).

<sup>25</sup> H U von Balthasar. *Kosmische Liturgie. Das Weltbild Masimus' des Bekenner* (Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1988<sup>3</sup>).

<sup>26</sup> Balthasar, 176–203.

<sup>27</sup> Balthasar, 177. Author's translation. 'Maximus ist, was die Theologie des Sündenfalls betrifft, wenig originell; er versucht, die Meinungen Früherer in Einklang zu bringen. Das Neue liegt bei ihm in der Weise, wie der Abfall im jeweiligen Heute als gegenwärtig betrachtet wird.'

<sup>28</sup> Gross, *Band II*, 266.

<sup>29</sup> Thunberg, 163.

immediate vision, without need for created things as mirrors of divine reality.<sup>30</sup>

The consequence of Maximus' understanding of humanity's freedom of will is that Adam's sin is seen as rebellion, as an act of pride, against God.<sup>31</sup> This attitude, a love opposed to God's love, which Augustine calls concupiscence, is for Maximus **filautia**. Originally, man's love or desire was spiritual but was subsequently directed towards the sensible world.<sup>32</sup> This misdirected love consists of two aspects: love of the physical, and egoism. The inherent difficulty of this kind of love is that it does not satisfy the real need of human nature. It is a longing for things without God and not according to God's ways, an attempt to nourish spiritual nature with sensual, temporal food. Rather than to nourish, it acts as poison.

Adam expected the soul to assimilate the sensual, however, in the end, the sensual assimilated the soul. Adam delivered the whole of nature to death, and death is now nourished by us.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, death and corruption are mysteriously linked to the first sin, through which the world became the field of **paqh**, passion.<sup>34</sup>

In response to the Fall a negative counterpart to sensual pleasure (**hdunh**) was introduced by God as a punitive counter-force: pain (**ojdunh**). Pain reveals the destructive force of sensual pleasure. From now on, humanity cannot escape the polarity of pleasure and pain. Humanity's 'new object of intellectual activity'<sup>35</sup> is the attempt to find methods to increase pleasure and avoid pain.

Maximus distinguishes between the moral disharmony, the 'voluntary sin', and its physical consequence, 'the physical sin'. The judgement of Adam's voluntary sin was the transformation of nature to pathos, corruption, and death. This distinction is used to explain how the Saviour, being without sin, could become a 'sin' or 'curse' for us by taking the 'physical sin' on himself.<sup>36</sup> Adam passed on corruption, death and 'physical sin'. The difficulty that arises here in Maximus' thought is that it is hardly possible to distinguish between 'physical sin' which impacts will, and 'voluntary sin'. The ontological cannot easily be disentangled from the ethical, because 'voluntary sin' in the true sense existed only for Adam, not for us.

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<sup>30</sup> Balthasar, 183.

<sup>31</sup> Balthasar, 181.

<sup>32</sup> Cf Thunberg's discussion of Maximus' understanding of lust (*hēdonē*), in Thunberg, 161,165; Balthasar, 181.

<sup>33</sup> 'Difficulty', 10, 28. Louth, A. *Maximus the Confessor*. (London: Routledge, 1996), 127.

<sup>34</sup> Balthasar, 182.

<sup>35</sup> Thunberg, 165.

<sup>36</sup> Balthasar, 194.

## Symeon the New Theologian: A Perspective that Includes the World

Symeon, the most important Byzantine mystic of the eleventh century, lived from 949 to 1022 during a turbulent time that led up to the schism of 1054, the mutual pronouncements of excommunication of the Orthodox and the Catholic church. At first, Symeon might have been called 'the New Theologian' in a derisory way by his opponents.<sup>37</sup> After all, to associate a theologian in the Orthodox church with innovation or creativity was a clear sign of his departure from holy tradition. Nevertheless, this title became for Symeon a title of honour and placed him alongside John the Evangelist and Gregory of Nazianzus, both called 'theologians' by the Eastern church.

If we search for Symeon's understanding of the consequences of the Fall in his Ethical Discourses, we will find that he repeatedly narrates the Genesis-account of creation, including the Fall, in a slightly modified vocabulary without extensive interpretation.<sup>38</sup> These narratives generally serve as introductions to the themes of incarnation and the renewal of creation.<sup>39</sup> A more detailed expression of Symeon's views concerning the effects of the Fall can be found in some of his homilies.<sup>40</sup>

The picture portrayed by Symeon is the following: Adam possessed an incorruptible body and lived in an incorruptible world prior to the fall.<sup>41</sup> He was holy, passionless, pure and had no need for a law.<sup>42</sup> His transgression brought about a blindness and senselessness which made instruction and enlightenment from above necessary. It also effected a temporal chastisement which expresses itself in thirst, hunger, need for clothing and for work<sup>43</sup>, and ultimately in corruption and death. Death consists of a death of the soul followed by a bodily death.<sup>44</sup> However, death is not always seen by Symeon in a negative way. Sometimes he regards it as a gift of God which grants humanity a rest from the chastisements before they are resurrected and glorified through the new Adam,

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<sup>37</sup> A Golitzin. *St Symeon the New Theologian. On the Mystical Life: The Ethical Discourses. Vol. 3: Life, Times and Theology.* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997), 7.

<sup>38</sup> 'First Ethical Discourse', 2; 'Second Ethical Discourse', 3, 7. St Symeon the New Theologian. *On the Mystical Life: The Ethical Discourses. Vol. 1 The Church and the Last Things* (Transl. by A Golitzin). (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995), 26–27, 98, 109.

<sup>39</sup> 'Second Ethical Discourse', 7. St Symeon, Vol. 1, 109; cf also Hom. 45. *The Sin of Adam*, 74f.

<sup>40</sup> Cf Saint Symeon the New Theologian, *The Sin of Adam and our Redemption* (Platina, Ca.: Saint Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1979).

<sup>41</sup> 'First Ethical Discourse', 2, St Symeon, Vol. 1, 26–27.

<sup>42</sup> Hom. 2. *The Sin of Adam*, 41.

<sup>43</sup> Hom. 10. *The Sin of Adam*, 46.

<sup>44</sup> 'Second Ethical Discourse', 7; 'First Ethical Discourse', 3. St Symeon, Vol. 1, 109, 33; Hom. 1. *The Sin of Adam*, 35.

Christ.<sup>45</sup>

Symeon's account is slightly different from that of his fellow Orthodox theologians because it is more explicit concerning the effects of the fall on creation. Symeon prefers to quote Scripture rather than the Fathers, and is therefore closer to the Genesis-account which depicts the fall in a manner that does not solely focus on humanity. Symeon explicitly mentions that the earth became transitory and subject to corruption, not just humanity.<sup>46</sup> It is, therefore, also in need of renewal.

Symeon acknowledges that humanity participates in ancestral sin from conception and birth without necessarily having to commit personal sin.<sup>47</sup> Humankind needs a rebirth by which it is reunited to God and which restores the powers of the soul so that they are in a condition comparable to that prior to the fall. However, there is no teaching concerning damnation on account of inherited guilt, not even where one would expect to find it, in his teaching on infant baptism.<sup>48</sup> Symeon also mentions God-pleasing people, Enoch and Elijah, who were directly translated from the earth and thus delivered from corruption. He solely acknowledges a certain temporal process of increased ignorance of God which ends in complete corruption, at which point in time God sends his Son for humanity's salvation.<sup>49</sup>

### **Gregory Palamas: The Unnatural State of Human Nature**

The central theological figure in the late medieval Orthodox church was Gregory Palamas (1296–1359) who is known mainly for his teaching on Divine essence and energies, and for his contribution to Hesychasm. Palamas expressed his thought in a series of polemic writings addressing specific situations and challenges, one of which was Barlaam's humanistic teaching. It is especially the first stage of the dispute with Barlaam which provides us with sources relevant to his understanding of humanity and fallenness. Additionally, we can also find sections on fallenness in the One Hundred and Fifty Chapters,<sup>50</sup> written in a relatively quiet period after the triumph of Palamism in the council of 1347.

For Palamas, man was created to be the 'goal of the whole creation',<sup>51</sup> 'the conclusion of the universe'.<sup>52</sup> He was endowed with freedom of will, which

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<sup>45</sup> Hom. 10. *The Sin of Adam*, 46.

<sup>46</sup> 'First Ethical Discourse', 2. St Symeon, Vol. 1, 28; Hom. 45. *The Sin of Adam*, 74f.

<sup>47</sup> Hom. 37. *The Sin of Adam*, 52, 54; Hom. 66. *The Sin of Adam*, 85.

<sup>48</sup> Gross, *Band II*, 552.

<sup>49</sup> 'First Ethical Discourse', 2. St Symeon, Vol. 1, 30–31.

<sup>50</sup> Particularly in chapters 41 to 63.

<sup>51</sup> See J Meyendorff. *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, trans. G. Lawrence (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998), 118, for references to primary sources.

<sup>52</sup> Cf Meyendorff, 118.

distinguished him as a 'rational' being from the animals.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, man had not yet been perfected. Rather, by help of the world which served him as a mirror reflecting supernatural realities, and by his heart, having been made in the image of God, he had access to God necessary for an increased knowledge of the creator and thus for an increasingly closer union with him.<sup>54</sup>

Palamas does not regard human nature as self-sufficient. It only fulfils its true destiny by the grace of God in communion with him. **fusi**" is for him not a static notion but has to be seen in a particular existential mode or state. Before the fall, human nature was in communion with God and thus fulfilled its destiny. This was, according to Meyendorff, 'essentially the "natural state of [human] nature"'.<sup>55</sup> After the Fall, human nature found itself deprived of divine life. It was now mortal and in a state contrary to its destiny. Humanity was separated from grace and left in a state dominated by the insufficiencies of created nature without God. Humanity kept the divine image but was deprived of the likeness of God.<sup>56</sup>

Palamas' understanding of death is very similar to that of Symeon. First, there is the death of the soul caused by sin. This is a separation from God. However, the soul remains immortal regarding its existence. Palamas can therefore speak of 'the eternal death of the immortal soul'.<sup>57</sup> With the death of the soul man's body became subject to suffering and corruption. Second, Palamas speaks of the death of the body caused by the separation of the immortal, life-sustaining soul from it.<sup>58</sup>

For Palamas, we have inherited Adam's corruption and death which can lead us to sin, but not his guilt. This might seem to diminish or to downplay our sinfulness. Palamas, on the contrary, sees in it an intensification of our responsibility, for 'it is not so serious to wish to taste a deadly plant before you have tried it as to want to eat it all knowing by experience that it is deadly. The man who knowingly takes poison is more to blame... Thus every one of us deserves, more than Adam, to be blamed and condemned.'<sup>59</sup> For Palamas it is clear that '...no one lived entirely without sin...'.<sup>60</sup>

### **Vladimir Lossky: The Problem of Choice**

Vladimir Lossky (1903–1958), one of the most influential twentieth century

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<sup>53</sup> Meyendorff, 124.

<sup>54</sup> Meyendorff, 118.

<sup>55</sup> Meyendorff, 122.

<sup>56</sup> Meyendorff, 122.

<sup>57</sup> Meyendorff, 123.

<sup>58</sup> Meyendorff, 123.

<sup>59</sup> Gregory Palamas, *Capita 55, The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*, ed. and trans. R E Sinkewicz. (Toronto: Pontifical institute of mediaeval studies), 1988.

<sup>60</sup> *Capita* 53.



Orthodox theologians, spent most of his life in Paris. He tried to develop an Orthodoxy based on the Fathers devoid of what he regarded as the philosophical dilettantism of the Russian tradition.<sup>61</sup>

Lossky describes the original state of humanity in the following way: Man was created perfect in the sense that he was able to communicate and be increasingly united with God.<sup>62</sup> In this context Lossky emphasises that ‘Nature and grace do not exist side by side, rather there is a mutual interpenetration of one another ...’.<sup>63</sup> He adds later that ‘the idea of supererogatory grace which is added to nature in order to order it towards God is foreign to the tradition of the Eastern Church.’<sup>64</sup>

With Symeon, Lossky insists that perfect nature is free from the freedom of choice.<sup>65</sup> Only fallen humanity that no longer naturally knows what is good is free to choose, or better, is forced to choose freely.

Humanity’s transition from perfection to imperfection is, as far as theological consistency is concerned, always a tricky area. Lossky, among others, does not manage to escape from suspicion here, because, having asserted that perfect humanity has no need of choice, he subsequently states that humanity has disobeyed God’s commandment and chosen the way of detachment.

This disobedience, a moral, personal act with physical consequences, caused a withdrawal of uncreated grace. It is an unnatural state of human nature which leads to disintegration, a complex phenomenon of which only two aspects will be mentioned here. First, physical disintegration is caused by a misdirected appetite, i.e., inanimate physical food is substituted for spiritual food. Second, social disintegration is caused by a shift from unity to individualism which already happened in the first two human persons.<sup>66</sup> This process of disintegration ends in death.<sup>67</sup>

### **Georges Florovsky: Thoughts on Sin and Death**

Georges Florovsky (1893–1979) was, like Lossky, hostile to the influence of western thought and the assimilation of post-enlightenment philosophy in Russian Orthodox theology. He promoted a neo-patristic synthesis. In contrast to Lossky he was more directly engaged with philosophical questions.<sup>68</sup> Volume three of his collected works, entitled ‘Creation and Redemption’, contains papers with statements relevant to our topic. The statements are embedded in larger

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<sup>61</sup> R. Williams, ‘Eastern Orthodox Theology’, in *The Modern Theologians*, ed. D. F. Ford (Oxford: Blackwell, 1977<sup>2</sup>), 505.

<sup>62</sup> V Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1991), 126.

<sup>63</sup> Lossky, 126.

<sup>64</sup> Lossky, 131.

<sup>65</sup> Lossky, 125.

<sup>66</sup> Lossky, 123.

<sup>67</sup> Lossky, 132.

<sup>68</sup> Williams, 508.

discussions on creaturehood, the existence of evil, and redemption. The central themes in Florovsky's discussions of the Fall are those of Romans 5: sin, death, and the causal link between the two.

Florovsky states that, 'In the *first* Adam the inherent potentiality of death by disobedience was disclosed and actualized'.<sup>69</sup> Thus, sin brought death into the world and, as it were, 'sets up a new law of existence for creation, a kind of anti-law'.<sup>70</sup> Sin is conceived of in different ways, depending on the context. Sometimes it is regarded as disobedience, as in the above mentioned example. At other times it is regarded as the unique source of evil, being the opposition to God and separation from him,<sup>71</sup> and as disorder, discord, lawlessness,<sup>72</sup> that estranges the whole creation from God. It not only brings about creation's and humanity's separation from God, enmity within creation and the resulting suffering,<sup>73</sup> it is also responsible for the destruction of the unity of body and soul by death.<sup>74</sup>

For Florovsky, '...human nature becomes unsettled, goes out of tune, as it were, is decomposed. The very structure of man becomes unstable.'<sup>75</sup> The body, now governed by passions, turns into the prison of the soul.<sup>76</sup> These passions, being impersonal themselves, depersonalise human personality.<sup>77</sup> Nevertheless, the body is not regarded as being inherently evil due to its materiality in a Platonising fashion. Rather, Florovsky acknowledges that evil comes from spirit, not from matter. Evil is the infidelity of a love that turns away from God to its own ego as the focal point. Therefore, Florovsky regards original sin as self-eroticism, pride and vanity.<sup>78</sup>

Florovsky is close to Pseudo-Macarius when he states that, 'it is as though there were two souls within each person. Good and evil are strangely mixed'.<sup>79</sup> Fallen

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<sup>69</sup> G Florovsky. *Creation and Redemption: Collected Works, Volume 3* (Belmont, Mass: Nordland Publishing, 1976), 230. His italics; the following sentence talks about the second Adam's reversal of this process.

<sup>70</sup> Florovsky, 50.

<sup>71</sup> Florovsky, 84.

<sup>72</sup> Florovsky, 106.

<sup>73</sup> Florovsky, 88, 89.

<sup>74</sup> Florovsky, 107.

<sup>75</sup> Florovsky, 104.

<sup>76</sup> Florovsky, 104.

<sup>77</sup> Florovsky, 87.

<sup>78</sup> Florovsky, 86.

<sup>79</sup> Florovsky, 91.

humanity is characterised as finding it easier to do evil than to do good,<sup>80</sup> a notion also found in Kallistos Ware.<sup>81</sup> Florovsky's strength is that he does not get caught up in speculative ontological or metaphysical explanations in his presentation of the effects of the fall.

Florovsky regards death in two ways: as the self-revelation of sin and as the anticipation of resurrection. He states, 'Death is the wages of sin, yet at the same time it is also a healing process, a medicine, a sort of fiery tempering of the impaired structure of man.'<sup>82</sup> In this positive assessment of death he goes even beyond Symeon's view. It is obvious that this interpretation of death is not without its problems and is only possible within a framework of thought in which resurrection is presupposed. Florovsky's statements which ascribe goodness to death are certainly an invitation for reflection and discussion.

### **Dumitru Staniloae: The Shift in the Perception of Creation**

Fr Dumitru Staniloae, the most important contemporary Romanian Orthodox theologian (1903-1993), wrote an Orthodox dogmatics, which was published in a German translation consisting of three volumes.<sup>83</sup> Volume one deals with general topics such as revelation, the being and attributes of God and the doctrine of creation. It also contains a lengthy section on the Fall and its consequences.<sup>84</sup> Staniloae develops this section by drawing on Church fathers and theologians such as Saints Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, Maximus, Symeon the New Theologian and Gregory Palamas. His predominant perspective in this section is epistemological.

The discourse starts with thoughts on the question, 'How long did the original state of mankind last?'<sup>85</sup> For Staniloae the original parents were without sin, however, they were not yet perfect. Their growth in perfection involved practising doing good and contemplation. It was God's intention that they should consolidate their goodness by co-operating with God. The original sin happened early on in this process of perfection, not out of compulsion, but out of ignorance (**apoulia**) which involves a carelessness and slowness. Therefore, man sinned because of ill will. By this act of disobedience humanity broke off the positive dialogue with God. It ceased to be responsible to God and wanted to maintain autonomy and freedom.

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<sup>80</sup> Florovsky, 89.

<sup>81</sup> K Ware. *The Orthodox Way* (London, Oxford: Mowbray, 1987).

<sup>82</sup> Florovsky, 108.

<sup>83</sup> The English translation, of which only volume one has already been published, is planned to consist of six volumes.

<sup>84</sup> D Staniloae. *Orthodoxe Dogmatik, I. Ökumenische Theologie Band 12*, eds. Jüngel, Kasper, Küng, Moltmann, (Zürich, Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1985), 417-437.

<sup>85</sup> Staniloae, 417-419.

The Fall did not eradicate goodness in humankind completely. But this goodness is no longer exclusively used for good purposes, for it can also constitute the bridge over which evil can enter.<sup>86</sup> Staniloae points out that evil by itself is not attractive because its destructive consequences are easily recognisable. It is only in combination with goodness or beauty that evil is able to deceive, promising good but inherently containing destruction. Neither did the Fall blot out the *imago dei* completely which was only weakened and darkened. This situation results in suffering because humanity is ultimately not content to accept solely the satisfaction of lower desires or urges, evil, and the prospect of eternal non-existence.

As a result, the visible world was no longer looked upon in a spiritual way, as something transparent to God, reflecting his glory and expressing a mystery, but rather in a sensual way in which it became the ultimate reality, entirely lacking transparency to God. In this way the mediatory role of God's creation was narrowed down to physical knowledge, a knowledge devoid of the ultimate meaning and goal of reality.<sup>87</sup>

Human self-centredness led to a shift in the perception of the world from subject to object. Now, the world is perceived as containing objects, human beings as well as animals and things, that can be used and exploited for one's own ends, rather than as subjects with which one stands in appropriate communion, and from whom one learns to live in an attitude of co-operation and harmony.

Post-lapsarian spiritual as well as physical death and corruption are for Staniloae consequences not only of sin, but also of the subsequent partial withdrawal of God's energies and God's Spirit from the world.<sup>88</sup>

Staniloae expresses the consequences of original sin also as a shift from the pre-lapsarian movement of ever-increasing convergence and unification of the different parts of creation, the growth in perfection already mentioned, to a movement of divergence and dissolution which can only be inverted by Christ from whom creation receives the unifying, ever-living Spirit.<sup>89</sup>

### **Kallistos Ware: A Balanced Summary**

Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia, or as he was known earlier on, Timothy Ware, was born in 1934. He became a Fellow of Pembroke College, Oxford, in 1970. His thorough acquaintance with western thought and likewise with Greek Orthodoxy enable him to present the Orthodox teaching in a way that takes into account 'Western' questions, such as 'grace and free will' and 'original sin'. His passages

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<sup>86</sup> Staniloae, 421.

<sup>87</sup> Staniloae, 423.

<sup>88</sup> Staniloae, 427.

<sup>89</sup> Staniloae, 424.

on fallenness in his two influential works, *The Orthodox Church*<sup>90</sup> and *The Orthodox Way*,<sup>91</sup> are a well-balanced summary of the Orthodox position.<sup>92</sup>

Kallistos' presentation is in many respects similar to that of Staniloae, without, however, the strong gravitation towards epistemology. It also discusses the topic of 'image and likeness', ascribing to the image a permanent quality which was not eradicated by the fall, and to the likeness a dynamic state, acquired by degrees, which depends on our moral choice. Additionally, it contains elements we found in Palamas, e.g. the understanding that human nature is in an 'unnatural' state since the fall.

## VARIATIONS ON A THEME

What were we able to discover on our journey through Orthodoxy? We have seen that apart from the differences of emphasis and of perspective there are real differences in the theologians discussed, e.g. in the various views on the original state of man. However, there are central topics on which a consensus can be found.

One element in this consensus is the understanding of sin. The theologians do not express a teaching regarding inherited guilt. Often, one could argue, they reject it implicitly, e.g. in discussions on infant baptism; sometimes even explicitly, as is the case with some contemporary theologians. This does not mean that their hamartiology lacks the moral/forensic perspective, as we have clearly seen. However, the predominant concern of our theologians is the ontological perspective.

There is, additionally, a clear consensus on the ontological effects of the first sin. Amongst others these are humanity's imprisonment by passion, evil desires, a change in the perception of the world which no longer serves as a mirror revealing divine truths, humanity's deterioration, decay, and ultimately death. This scope of understanding is not limited to the relationship with God. The whole variety of distortions of relations within the created order that the Fall brought about are integrated in the discussion. The consequences of Adam's sin are presented in all their dimensions. One advantage of this perspective is that it enables theologians to engage directly with aspects of life such as spirituality and asceticism. Or, in other words, the effects of sin are not discussed in an isolated fashion. Rather, they often serve as a starting point for elaboration on the incarnation and on the need for deification.

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<sup>90</sup> Ware, T. *The Orthodox Church* (London: Penguin, 1997).

<sup>91</sup> Ware, K. *The Orthodox Way* (London: Mowbray, 1982).

<sup>92</sup> Not all Orthodox would agree with this assessment. Cf the criticisms voiced against Bishop Kallistos by Hieromonk Patapios in his reviews of the two books: 'Critical Comments on Bishop Kallistos' *The Orthodox Way*', *Orthodox Tradition* Vol XVI:3&4, 30–51 ([http://www.orthodox.com/phronema/review\\_toc.htm](http://www.orthodox.com/phronema/review_toc.htm)); and 'A Traditionalist Critique of *The Orthodox Church*', *Orthodox Tradition*, Vol XVI:1, 39–72 ([http://www.orthodoxinfo.com/phronema/review\\_tow.htm](http://www.orthodoxinfo.com/phronema/review_tow.htm)).

In Eastern Orthodoxy, the theological expression of the present human condition, marked by fallenness and sinfulness, is not left to have the last word. Temporarily, it may cause disillusionment. However, such a disillusionment, if not already consciously experienced in daily shortcomings and frustrations, is necessary for an appropriate assimilation and understanding of the hope found in God's redemptive activity in Christ.